

CORD MEYER

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# Winds of independence

In his anxiety to demonstrate that Lithuania is an internal "Soviet problem" and does not deserve to be discussed at the summit, one of the Soviet advance men in Washington, Nikolai Shishlin, has put out a misleading and inaccurate account of how Lithuania came to be accepted on Aug. 3, 1940, as a member of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Citing a declaration of the Lithuanian parliament on July 21, 1940, opting for "the Soviet system," Mr. Shishlin implies that the Lithuanian people legally and freely chose to become a republic within the Soviet Union.

In historical fact, the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939 set the stage for the Soviet invasion of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in 1940 by the Red army. Puppet communist parties were then imposed by force to consolidate communist rule, and after rigged elections these illegitimate governments obediently petitioned to join the Soviet Union.

As supporters of the Baltic cause in Washington are quick to point out, this whole elaborate farce had no

more legitimacy than Josef Stalin's show trials. The quickest way to restore their independence to the now freely elected governments of the three Baltic states would be for the Supreme Soviet in Moscow to repudiate the illegal 1940 vote of its predecessor, as Mr. William Hyland has proposed.

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Quite understandably, the freely elected Lithuanian government refuses to rescind or suspend its March 11 declaration of independence. Such recision would mean acceptance of member status in the Soviet Union and would subject the Baltic states to the draconian process of a new secession law that

makes it virtually impossible to leave the union.

If glasnost has its limits when applied to the events of 1940, it is also less than complete in its application to the statements made by Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov regarding the current blockade of Lithuania by the Soviet regime.

On May 24, Mr. Ryzhkov told the Supreme Soviet in Moscow, "We have not conducted an economic blockade of Lithuania . . . only supplies of oil and some gas have been halted to Lithuania. That's all." In fact, as Vilnius Radio reported on April 28, blockaded supplies included oil products, sheet metal, pipes, plastics, tires, paper, tractors, trucks and cars, etc.

State Department officials are enormously impressed by the stoic and disciplined determination with which the entire Lithuanian population has responded to a blockade that now threatens to bring nearly all traffic to a halt. Critical operations in hospitals are being postponed, and more than 200,000 are reported to be on the verge of unemployment due to fuel shortages.

In spite of these hardships, Radio Moscow reported on May 28 that 72

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percent of 1,000 people polled in Vilnius supported the Lithuanian parliament's decision not to revoke the independence declaration. Only 19 percent said the declaration should be revoked, down from 21 percent in April. The economic blockade has only increased the resistance to Soviet rule.

In Estonia, Russian-speaking groups began picketing this week in Tallinn in support of Estonia's independence, and pro-independence pickets have declared this to be Democratic-Russian speaking Solidarity Week for the independence

aspirations of the Estonian people.

In Latvia, the Supreme Council on May 28 rejected Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's May 14 decree repudiating the Latvian independence declaration, and this rejection passed 105-to-2 with one abstention.

One more indication of which way the wind is blowing on the subject of Baltic independence among the Russian population is the election of Boris Yeltsin this week as president of the Russian Republic. In this potentially very powerful position, he now joins the newly elected democratic leaders of Moscow and Leningrad in their support of the right of the Baltic peoples to choose independence.

Even as Mr. Gorbachev arrived in Washington, President Bush was be-

ing warned by Sergei A. Kovalyov's comment in the press that Western reluctance to pressure Mr. Gorbachev on issues like Lithuania is "shortsighted."

A confidant of the late Andrei D. Sakharov and a member of the Russian Republic's parliament, Mr. Kovalyov advised that without Western pressure Mr. Gorbachev was free to appease his hard-liners in the party and military and to slip farther behind the public mood.

The more clearly and firmly Mr. Bush can speak out at this summit on the issue of Baltic independence, the better for everyone concerned, the Balts, the Russians and the Americans.